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Exploration and Discovery

WARKA, THE RUINS OF ERECH (GEN. 10:10)

Warka is the largest of all the Babylonian ruins. Not only on account of its size is it interesting; it figures in the great Babylonian epic as the scene where Izdubar and Ea-bani killed the bull sent by the goddess Ishtar to destroy them; there the goddess herself lived; and, according to Gen. 10:10, it was one of the cities which were the beginning of the kingdom of the mighty hunter, Nimrod.

Originally the city was on the Euphrates; for we are told that, after the bull was killed, Izdubar and his companion washed their hands in its waters. Now the river is an hour away to the west. The nearest modern Arab town is Samana, not far from the point where the Hindieh canal returns to the Euphrates; the nearest Arab settlement is Huther, or Khidhr, the seat of a mudir.

At daylight, December 2, we left the small bitumen boat in which we had floated down the stream from Samana, and searched among the mud huts of Huther for the residence of the mudir. As this official was still in bed, the soldier at the door ushered us into a small, dark hole, which was the reception room and the official headquarters. Here we were content to wait and escape from the drizzling rain in which we had been sleeping. When the mudir appeared, I presented him with a letter of introduction, and asked him to provide me with an escort and guide to Warka. As a result of the hard rains, the Euphrates had overflowed its banks and converted the country far inland into a swamp. To reach Warka a detour of several hours would therefore be necessary, and we accepted the mudir's suggestion to float down the river to Derajieh, a place from which both Warka and Senkereh could be visited. The suggestion was a happy one both for the mudir and for us; it saved him the trouble of providing us with horses, and it gave us an opportunity to see Ajil, the sheik of the El-Budour, who was at war with Saadun, and the field upon which the fiercest Arab battle of the year had been fought.

Three hours later we were at Derajieh, a small village of mud huts built along the telegraph line. Sheik Ajil, a hard-faced old man, read the letter which we brought him, and received us pleasantly enough, but assured us that on account of the recent troubles he could not entertain us in his guest-house nor provide us with food. The real excuse he was

ashamed to give; he belongs to the Shiite branch of Mohammedanism, and contact with us would be pollution. Ajil, to whatever extent our presence might be pollution, could see no pollution in what he called Frank money, and he promptly demanded 50 cents for the boy whom he would send for our horses. The price for each animal was 80 cents a day in advance—an exorbitant sum for the desert; but we were obliged to yield, and were assured that the horses would be ready at sunrise. It was long after sunrise the next morning when the sheik entered the telegraph office to announce that he had just sent a boy to a neighboring encampment for them. It was evident that he had no intention of keeping his contract, and we obliged him to listen for a few moments to language hardly compatible with his dignity as sheik. The language was effective, for he quickly disappeared and as quickly returned, not only with the horses, but with his own big, black eunuch as a guide.

Our road to Warka, three hours away, led over the grassy plain, which was dotted here and there with groups of black tents and immense herds of donkeys. Ahmed suggested that none but the donkey could thrive on Ajil's land. Long before we reached the mound, the surface of the plain was strewn with potsherds, and an occasional stone saw or marble vase fragment showed that at no late age the city extended far beyond its walls. The walls, now represented by a long, low ridge, in places twenty feet high (Loftus says fifty), may still be traced; a wide break near the center of the eastern ridge seems to indicate the point where the Shatt en Nil left the city. The mound itself is a quarter of a mile beyond the walls.

Like Tel Ibrahim, the main ruin at Warka is crescent-shaped, and the high, conical hill, from the summit of which the temple protrudes, represents the star within the crescent. Like Bismya and Nippur, the ruins are divided by the wide bed of a canal into two unequal parts. The southern part is the smaller and the lower, but it is fully twelve meters in height; its surface is entirely covered with bricks of a late, probably Parthian, period. On one of its hills, Wuswas, the ruins of a house with an arched doorway appears above the dirt. The corners and doorway of another structure are decorated with large, round brick columns, a meter in diameter, and with square and semi-circular niches along its front wall. This is the large building which Loftus excavated in 1853. The square bricks used in its construction are laid in white mortar. This part of the ruin abounds in fragments of blue glazed slipper-shaped coffins, which have given the false impression that Warka was the ancient necropolis of Babylonia, as Nejef is of the Shiite world today. Glazed pottery fragments, square stone balls for slings, and copper coins corroded beyond recognition, frequently appear on the surface.

North of the canal bed are the larger and higher parts of the ruin which, like the southern part, are so thickly covered with the foundations of late buildings that it is difficult to form an opinion of what is concealed below. By far the most interesting and the highest hill of all is the ruin of the Ziggurat of the temple E-anna, the abode of the goddess Ishtar. The hill is called Buweriye. The Ziggurat was built up in courses, each of which measures a meter and a half in thickness, and they are separated from each other by reed mats or *hassir*. Each course consists of four layers of small mud brick, or *libbin*, laid flatwise. Above them are four more layers, in which the bricks are placed upon edge, and then again are four layers of bricks laid flatwise. Above all this, several thicknesses of *hassir* were spread to receive the next course above. Six such courses, representing a height of nine meters, are now visible above the débris about the base of the hill. In the Ziggurats at Ur and Akerkuf the method of construction is similar, and like them the Warka Ziggurat was undoubtedly incased with burned bricks.

Traces of the excavations carried on by the early English explorer Loftus still exist about the base of the temple hill. Fragments of inscribed bricks—one with a stamped inscription of three long lines, another with at least ten short lines, but illegible—abound. I found on the surface near the temple about twenty clay phallic symbols, all uninscribed, and varying in length from seven to fifteen centimeters. One was square and tapered to a point; others were almost identical in shape and size with a piece of chalk or blackboard crayon. Loftus says they were used in mural decorations, but now no trace of the wall in which he found similar ones is visible above ground.

The variety of bricks on the surface at Warka is unusual. Some are square, with one, three, or five lines drawn across the face; others are stamped on the face with a small triangle. Large, plain bricks, measuring 42x42x7 centimeters; half bricks, 30x18.5x8; bricks slightly plano-convex 30x18.5x4, with three thumb-marks on the face; and finally a very small brick, 20.5x11x5, bearing on the face three small holes made by the end of a round stick, are among the varieties. Nowhere on the surface did I see the small, plano-convex bricks which are the surest indication of the earliest Babylonian times; yet they surely exist deep in the ruins.

Warka is an immense ruin, more than a mile in length; Loftus says it is six miles in circumference. It is as high as Niffer and larger. To excavate it thoroughly would be an enormous task. Before the remains of the earliest periods could be found, large quantities of the accumulations of later ages must be removed, but the indications on the surface are that

the labor would be richly repaid. Probably no ruin in Babylonia conceals a greater number of antiquities of every variety and age. The ruin is public land; no sacred tomb or modern cemetery exists there; water may be easily obtained, and the place is accessible. Apart from its size, the greatest difficulty with which the excavator would meet is the hostility of the neighboring El-Budour Arabs; but in the desert, as elsewhere, money is all-powerful, or, as I overheard Sheik Ajil say to one of his men, "Frank *mejidihs* are as good as any."

A mile to the north of the ruin, possibly opposite one of the ancient gates, is a clay hill, conical in shape, and rising fifteen meters above the level of the desert. A little farther to the north is a similar hill, but still larger; and three others are visible in the distance. How high these artificial hills originally were, or what was their purpose, unless they were watchtowers outside the city, it would be difficult to say. Few fragments of pottery were scattered about them, and no *libbin*; nothing but unmixed mud seems to have been used in their construction.

We spent several hours at the ruin, ate luncheon on the summit of the temple, and in the late afternoon galloped back over the plain, chasing each other with imaginary spears in the Arabic fashion of mimic warfare—a sort of game resembling tag on horseback. On the way the big eunuch, whose horse could not equal mine in speed, became communicative and, handing me his gun, a modern Mauser rifle, explained with many motions how in a recent battle he had killed and robbed one of the Montifik. Nearing the village, he called me aside to a clump of bushes, pointed to a skull and bones from which the flesh had just been gnawed, and then, pointing to his gun, gave a hearty laugh. A number of Arabs killed in the recent battle lay unburied about the village.

We reached Derajieh at sunset. During the evening the telegraph operator beguiled the time by relating his troubles. We went to bed—if lying rolled up in a blanket on the ground can be called going to bed—to dream of Senkereh, the ruin which we hoped to visit in the morning.

EDGAR JAMES BANKS.

BAGDAD,
January 16, 1905.